

WOMEN'S  
PRISON ASSOCIATION  
HOPPER HOME INC.



110 SECOND AVENUE  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003  
TEL. 212-674-1163  
FAX 212-677-1981

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August 7, 1996

Reed Hunt  
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Hunt:

I am writing to address the Federal Communication Commission's definition of "universal service" stated in the Telecommunication Act of 1996 and to share with you my experience providing telecommunications, specifically voice mail, to poor New Yorkers.

I learned about the Telecommunications Act of 1996 at a meeting of human service agencies participating in New York Community Voice Mail. Part of the agenda was a discussion of the Benton Foundation "Up for Grabs" Conference in Washington DC last June and how "universal service" will impact the services I provide.

I am a provider of human services participating in New York Community Voice Mail (CVM), one of 20 CVM's throughout the country. New York CVM enables homeless and phoneless people to communicate with prospective employers, landlords, and case managers in addition to foster relationships with family and friends; allows women fleeing an abusive partner to rebuild their lives without the fear that a phone number leads to their address; and gives people with AIDS the dignity of accessing doctors and other service providers without others shelter residents or members of their household knowing their HIV+ status. My clients on voice mail have private seven digit telephone numbers that mimic a home answering machine. Without Community Voice Mail, my client would not be able to complete for jobs, housing or services the way you and I do, with the dignity of a telephone number.

Since February 1995, over 1,300 poor New Yorkers have used NYCVM to better the quality of their lives by communicating with human service agencies and by obtaining employment and housing opportunities. Of the nearly 600 people who have completed the NYCVM program, **209** found housing, **163** found employment, **298** used NYCVM as a temporary

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*communication link* allowing them to communicate with case managers, attorneys, doctors, current employers as well as friends and family, and **75** used NYCVM as a "*safe communication link*" to flee an abusive partner or to access AIDS related services confidentially.

Do not be fooled by the efforts of telephone companies who believe dumping thousands of voice mail boxes on poor Americans is a dignified solution to phonelessness. **Community Voice Mail's success is documented.** Provided by people who know the needs of its community. CVM is an efficient and compassionate model. Is there an opportunity for the "Baby Bells" to reach out to the phoneless community? Yes, and here are four suggestions:

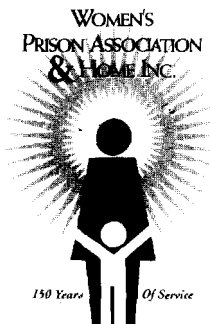
- Design and coordinate service delivery with the community of service providers and end users.
- Provide 1-800 numbers for CVM's so the end user is not required to deposit a quarter, or more, to retrieve his/her messages.
- Donate phone lines and DID (direct inward dial) trunks to CVM's. For example, New York CVM pays NYNEX each month for these services.
- Work with Community Technology Institute in Seattle to establish more CVM's by providing funding and technical assistance at the local level.

In a society that is infatuated with the "information superhighway", it would be devastating to our future as a nation to leave poor people behind by denying them access to the basic mode of communication - telephone service. While the Telecommunication act of 1996 focuses on access to the internet, basic telephone service cannot be overlooked. The internet is a wonderful opportunity to learn about services, housing and job opportunities. However, for those without a reliable communication link in addition to the internet, these are only missed opportunities.

HOPPER HOME ATI & FAMILY SERVICES  
SARAH POWELL HUNTINGTON HOUSE  
STEPS TO INDEPENDENCE  
TRANSITIONAL SERVICES UNIT

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\* Past Presidents



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If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Bettina Damiani  
the Administrator of New York Community Voice Mail at:

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Coalition for the Homeless  
89 Chambers Street, 3rd floor  
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(212) 964 - 5900 ext. 161  
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Best regards,

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